Fancy Free Walks *point your feet on a new path*

Deer Park, Botanical Gardens and Riverside
Richmond, Barnes, Strand-on-the-Green, Kew

Distance: max 18 km=11 miles with much shorter options easy walking

Region: Greater London Date written: 2-oct-2010

Author: Thwelder Date revised: 25-may-2015

Refreshments: everywhere Last update: 18-may-2026

Map: Explorer 161 (London South) or the larger A-Z

Problems, changes? We depend on your feedback: feedback@fancyfreewalks.org

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Parkland, riverside, history, botanic gardens

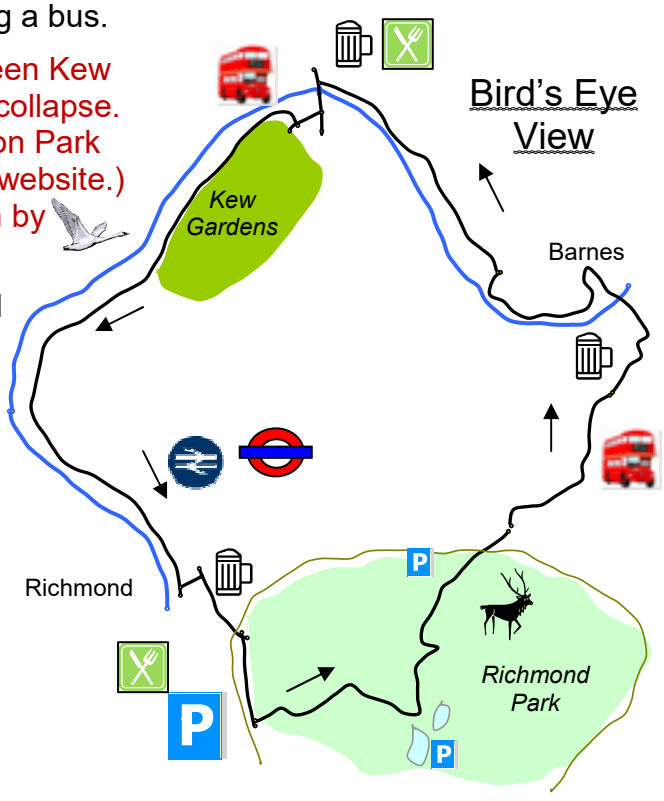
In Brief

A parkland and riverside walk through history, easily accessed by Underground, bus or car, this circular walk is a huge adventure. It takes you through part of Richmond Park, so vast that you think you are in open country, then along the River Thames alongside the UNESCO Word Heritage Site of Kew Gardens and back through Richmond with its enchanting river views so favoured by Turner and other painters.

This walk can be shortened by up to half using a bus.

2024-2025? The section of the towpath between Kew and Richmond is temporarily closed due to a collapse. There is an interesting alternative through Syon Park (see the link on the notice and the Richmond website.) They hope (optimistically?) to restore the path by summer 2025 (feedback please!).

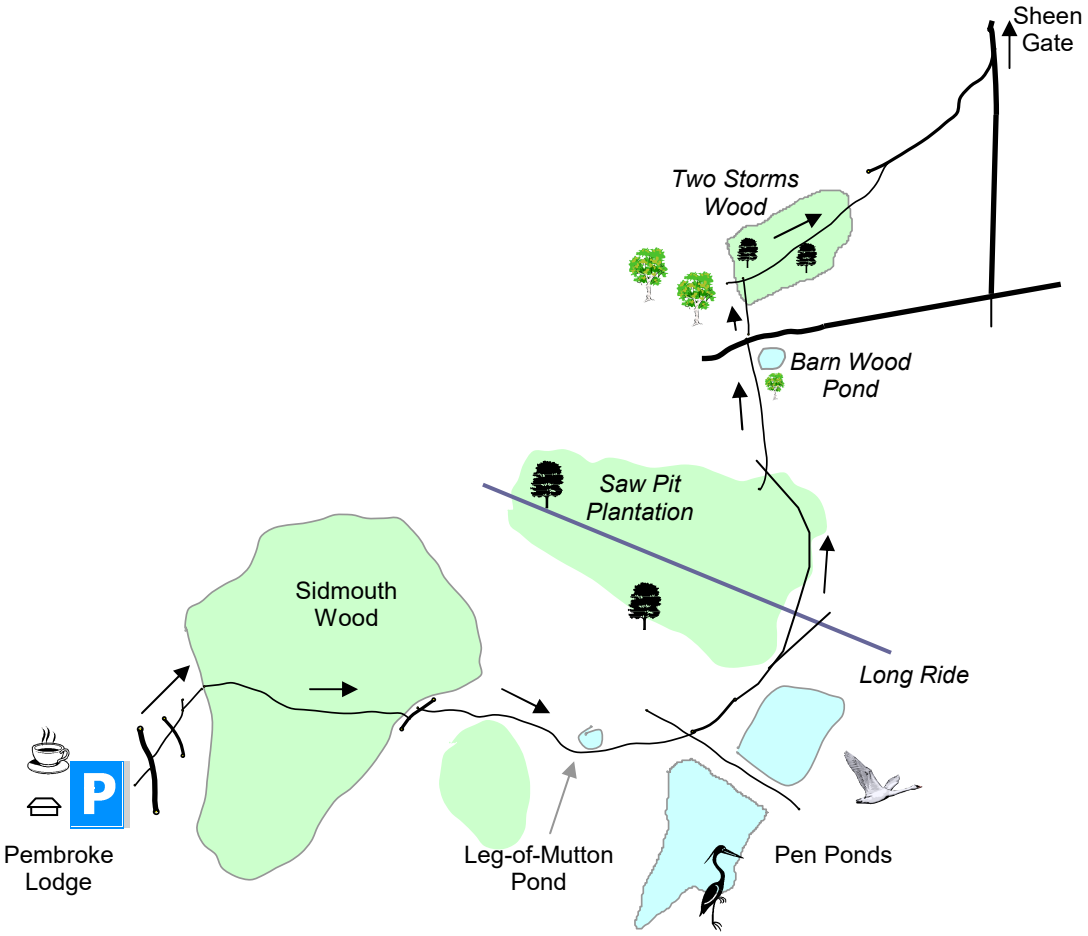
Any sensible footwear and clothing is fine and dogs are welcome everywhere (with a lead please because of the deer in the park!).



The walk begins at the **Pembroke Lodge** car park in Richmond Park in Greater London, w3w:invent.slang.quick, postcode **TW10 5HX**,. This is the large car park between Richmond Gate and Ham Gate. For more details see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**). The **Pen Ponds** car park and the **Sheen Gate** car park are also good starting points. For non-motorists, **Richmond station** (Underground or rail) and **Kew Gardens** are fine as starting points.

Leg 1: Pembroke Lodge to Sheen Gate 3 km=2 miles

Around the middle 1700s, Pembroke Lodge was a one-room cottage, occupied by a man whose duty was to protect huntsmen from molehills. The cottage, then enlarged, was rented by Elizabeth, Countess of Pembroke, a great beauty, who prevailed on King George III to grant it to her. In 1847 Queen Victoria gave the Lodge to Prime Minister Lord John Russell who conducted government business here. Visitors included Queen Victoria and the Prince Consort, Palmerston, Gladstone, Garibaldi, Thackeray, Dickens, Browning, Tennyson, Landseer and Lewis Carroll. The philosopher and mathematician Bertrand Russell spent his early years here. The Lodge then passed into private hands and during the war it was requisitioned by an Intelligence regiment known as the Phantom Squad. One member of the Squad was actor David Niven. The cottage suffered two direct hits from bombs in 1942 and 1944. Now the Lodge is a restaurant and centre for visitors, and a favourite location for weddings, since it offers fabulous views down to the Thames valley. The gardens, which you will see in more detail on the return leg, are also remarkable.



1 To start the walk, you have to find a hard-to-see secret gate that takes you through a nature reserve. From the car park, turn **left** on the road and, just 20m past the "OUT" way, by a refuse bin, turn **right** across the grass, passing to the left of a small enclosure of horse chestnuts. Cross a horse track and a footpath and, in 15m, fork **right** to the fence that borders the

woodland. You should find a black metal swing-gate in the fence exactly here. Go through the gate onto a wide strip that runs through Sidmouth Wood, now cleared of alien rhododendrons and replanted. You finally emerge through another metal gate with a good view over the park.

Richmond Park is a Royal Park whose connections began with Edward I in the 1200s when it was known as the Manor of Sheen. It was renamed when Henry VII built Richmond Palace nearby. In 1625 Charles I brought his court here from London to escape the plague and he turned it into a deer park, enclosing it with a fence (which still stands today) but he allowed pedestrians right of way. Today, the Park is a Site of Special Scientific Interest and a National Nature Reserve, abounding in grasslands, ancient trees and wildlife, especially red and fallow deer. The Park contains several woodland enclosures, including the (truly!) stunning Isabella Plantation, and great houses, such as the White Lodge where the Queen Mother and other royals once lived. There is a fine bike circuit round the edge measuring 12 km=7½ miles.

2 From the gate, go straight over a crossing path (marked as the *Capital Ring*), heading downhill on a grassy path with plump stunted oak trees on your left, keeping to the main path. The Pen Ponds are now in view ahead. You cross a cinder horse track and reach the small Leg of Mutton Pond. Keep on the main path all the way down to the two big Pen Ponds, a fine spot to view various types of waterbirds.

3 Do *not* turn right on the sandy track that runs over the causeway between the ponds but cross over it to a wide grassy path on the other side with the smaller pond over on your right. Keep to the **left** side of the open track, just to the right of a large oak wood, until you reach a wide green ride known as the Queen's Ride. *On the right in the distance is the White Lodge, a hunting lodge built for King George II in about 1727 and full of associations with the royal family.*

4 Go straight across the Queen's Ride, keeping to the left and skirting round another oak wood (the *Saw Plantation*). Stay near the edge of the trees on your left, with open parkland and a few individual trees on your right, until you reach the far corner of the wood, where the road is now visible. Now find a path that veers **very slightly right** down towards a group of delicate willows, easily distinguishable from the surrounding oak trees. *Don't miss this landmark!* The willows grow beside the small Barn Wood Pond. Pass to the left of the pond to reach the Sawyer's Hill Road, a major route for leisurely motor traffic through the park.

5 Cross the road to a faint path ahead leading up towards a metal fence. Keep the fence on your right to reach, in 40m, a large metal gate topped with Prince-of-Wales crowns. Turn **right** through the gate into a delightful nature reserve. *Two Storms Wood was enclosed in 1993 to preserve some especially old trees that thankfully survived the 1987 hurricane.* Stay on the main central path all the way to another similar gate on the other side. Keep ahead in the same direction across the grass. On your left is a line of trees and the Sheen car park. Ahead is the road that leads, left, to Sheen Gate which is to the right of the car park at the end of the trees. Join a stony track and, either on the track or by shortcut, turn **left** at the road and out through Sheen Gate, where there are loos and a drinking fountain.

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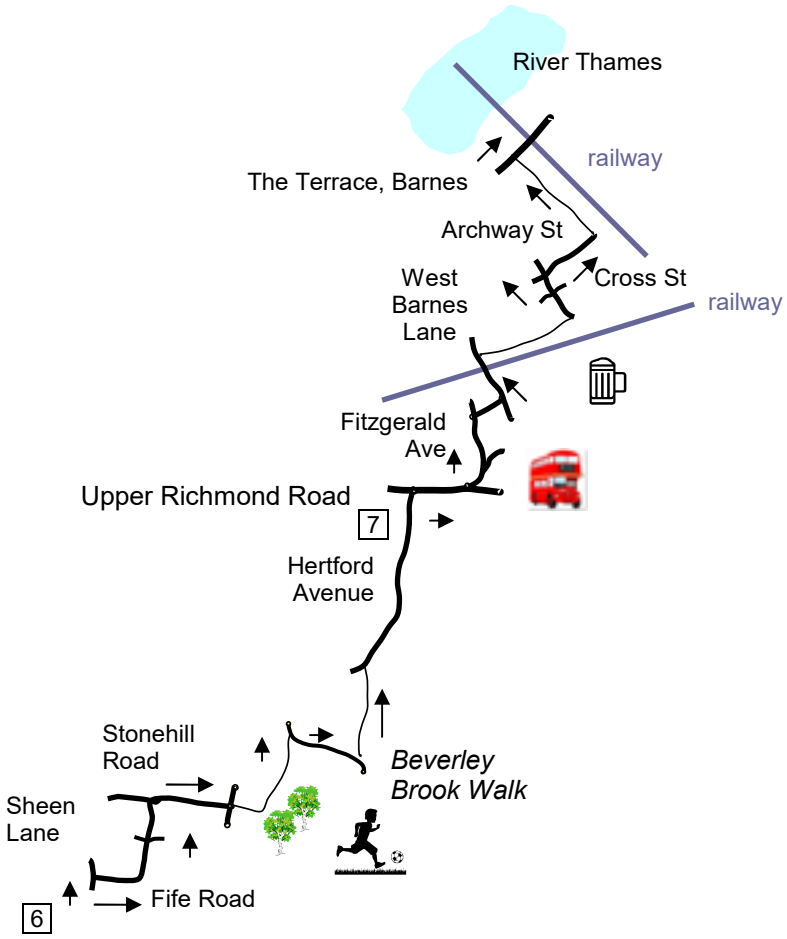
Leg 2: Sheen Gate to Barnes Bridge 3½ km=2 miles



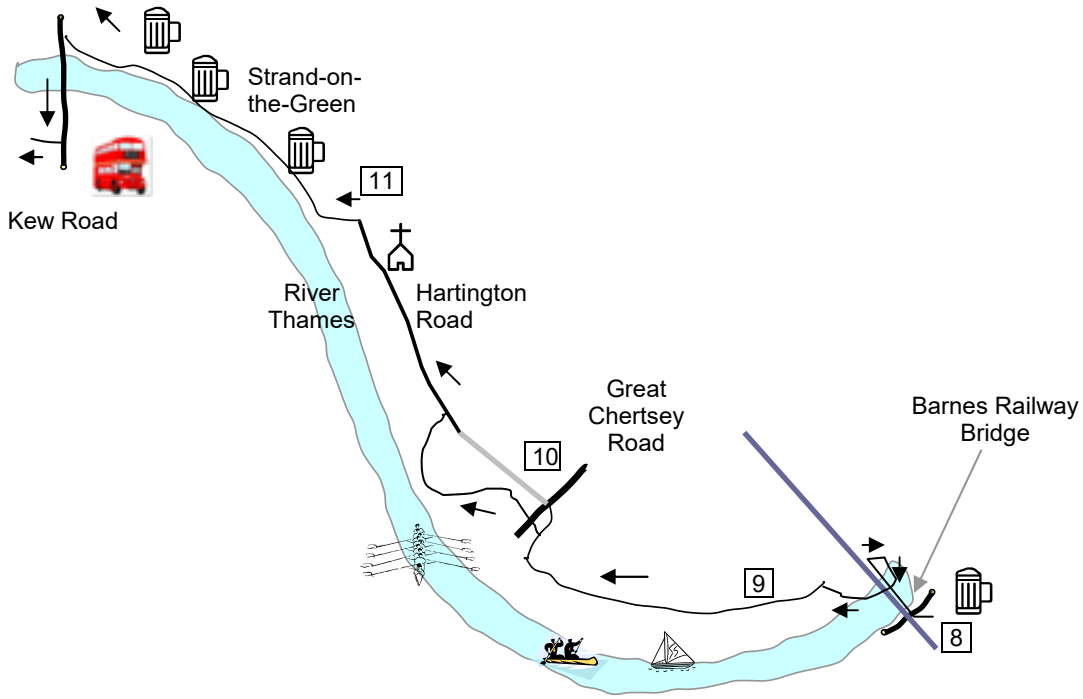
6 After Sheen gate, turn immediately **right** on Fife Road which bends left into Park Gate Gardens. Continue straight over Clare Lawn Avenue and turn **right** at a T-junction with Stonehill Road. At the end of the road, continue straight over on a footpath by a concrete post. Go over a crossing path and, just before the grass of the playing fields, Palewell Fields, veer **left**, staying in the woods. Follow the path past tennis courts to a minor road. Turn **right** on the road, going through a wooden barrier and past the Palewell public pitch-and-putt, then on a wide tarmac path. At a junction by a noticeboard, turn sharp **left**. You are now on part of the Beverley Brook Walk, with the brook on your right on its way to meet the Thames. The path runs by allotments and out to Hertford Avenue. Turn **right** on this road, ignoring a footpath opposite, going past Richmond Park Academy (the old Shene school now relaunched under the Government's scheme as a privately-sponsored academy). On reaching the main Upper Richmond Road, cross it and turn **right**.

Decision point. You can shorten the walk here by taking any bus going **left** into Richmond (for a *very* short walk), or from there to Kew Green using e.g. bus 65, but missing the next interesting section through Barnes and Mortlake.

7 Take the third road **left**, Priests Bridge, and take the first **left**, Fitzgerald Avenue. *No. 1A on the left is a unique house, built in a square medieval style with Latin date and inscriptions and date 1696.* Turn **right** with the road and, at a T-junction, turn **left** on West Barnes Lane, going over the level crossing. (As a diversion from here, if you turn **left** on North Worple Way and follow it for 500m to just past Worple Street, and **right** into the grounds of the church of Mary

Magdalen, you will find in the churchyard the tomb of the explorer Sir Richard Burton (translator of the *Kama Sutra* and *Arabian Nights*), shaped like a bedouin tent.) Immediately after the crossing, turn **right** beside the railway on Railway Side, going past some delightful cottages. At the end, turn **left** on Cross Street past the *Brown Dog* pub. Turn second **right** on Archway Street, passing more pastel-coloured dwellings. At the end, avoid a foot-path (Thorne Passage) sharp left but turn **left** on a path beside the railway known as Long Walk. *Note the painted gates.* The path takes you out to the road and riverside at Barnes. Turn **right** under the railway bridge. *Barnes is a simply fascinating London village, deserving of a whole volume to itself.*

Leg 3: Barnes Bridge to Kew Bridge 4 km=2½ miles



8 Turn immediately **right** up steps and **right** again onto the pedestrian path that runs over Barnes Railway Bridge. As you begin to cross the Thames, you have a good view of Barnes Village. On the other side of Barnes Railway Bridge, turn **right** on Dukes Meadow Footbridge, a new footbridge which loops right, back under the railway bridge. Where it joins a tarmac lane, turn **left**.

9 As indicated by the *Thames Path* sign, turn **left** through a metal barrier by Chiswick Boathouse and turn **right** alongside the river. Slip left onto a parallel footpath that runs close to the riverside. Continue along this wide riverside path. Soon You have a good view across to Mortlake. *The chemical factory with the tall chimney is the old Mortlake Brewery, originally Watney's, now Budweiser. The "Ship" pub stands defiantly close by. Mortlake is the end-point of the Oxford-and-Cambridge boat race that happens in March each year and the site where you are standing is a popular vantage point (despite the prolific knotweed).* At the end of the path, turn **right-left** round a brick boat club to join the tarmac and immediately fork **left** beside the club to go under the bridge through a narrow arch. With so many vast sport and health outlets on this side of the river, you may by now be feeling decidedly unfit.

10 Immediately after the bridge, avoid steps on the right and keep straight ahead through on a new permissive path belonging to the University of Westminster. (In the rare event that this path is closed, go **right** up the steps to join the road and turn **left** on Hartington Road.) Your path turns **right** and **left** and zigzags to cross Ibis Lane, continuing just to the left of a small apartment block. It then takes you **left** and **right** over lock gates. Continue between the river and houses and gardens. At the end, turn **right** between houses and bear **left** on a residential road, coming out between brick columns on Hartington Road. Turn **left** on the road. *This road is not without interest itself, house no. 61 being notable, together with the art deco neighbouring Hartington Court. St Pauls Church Grove Park opposite is worth a look. Built in 1872, it rejoices in its fine high triangular ceiling giving a strong impression of light and spaciousness.* At the end, you are met by Grove Park Road. At *Strand End*, filter **left** onto a tarmac path running close to the river.

11 You are now in a historic area of Chiswick known as Strand-on-the-Green.

Strand-on-the-Green was inhabited in Roman times and in the middle ages was called 'Stronde' and later 'Strand Green'. It is well-known for its photogenic cottages, pubs, almshouses and prouder dwellings. The steps and floodwalls show how they all have to defend themselves against the high waters that occasionally flood this area, so as to avoid the irritation suffered by Sir Barnet Skettles [1].

Go past Strand-on-the-Green House and the almshouses to reach the *Bulls Head*, a true beerhouse. Under the railway bridge, you reach the *City Barge*. *This pub, with its big clock, originally called the Navigators Arms, is well-known as a location for two Beatles films.* If the pubs are full and you would like an originally-sourced coffee and maybe a ciabatta, about 150m after the *City Barge*, turn **right** through narrow Ship Alley and cross the road to the Central American-themed *Coffee Traveller*, recommended by walkers; retrace your steps afterwards. Continue, passing *Dutch House* with its blue and white shutters and benches, and *Compass House*. *The blue plaque indicates the last residence of the great Anglo-German society painter Johann Zoffany (1733–1810).* The last pub is the *Bell & Crown* (Fullers), which is more for families and food. *Altogether, none of the three pubs is exceptional, though they make for a jovial pub crawl, in view of the short distances between them.* The last section runs beside the road. On reaching Kew Bridge, go up steps and turn **left** on the footway of Kew Road, over the bridge. [But see page one regarding temporary closure: if closed, stay on this side of the river and go through Syon Park and Isleworth (or take a bus).]

Decision point. You can shorten the walk here by taking a bus going **left** over the bridge to Richmond and rejoining the walk there. You will however miss some of the best river walking in the South East.

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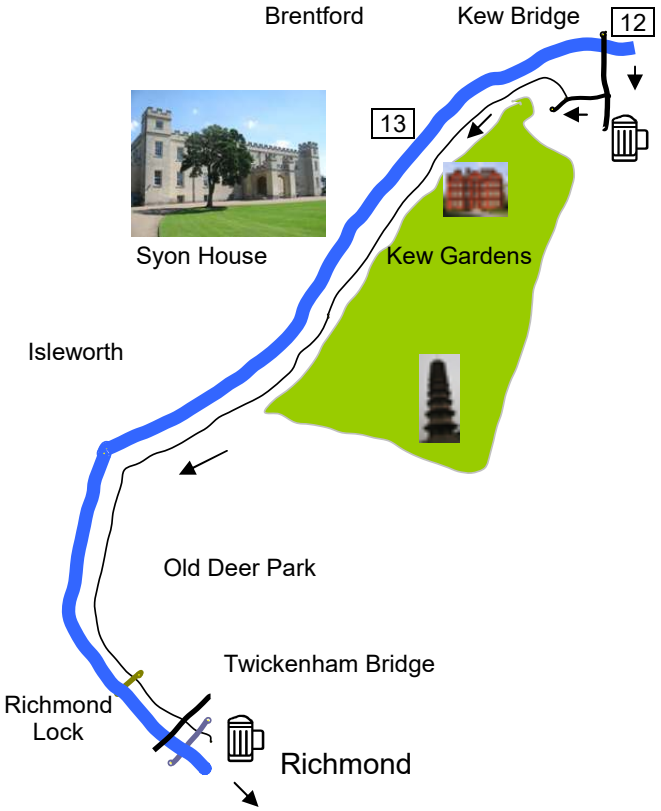
1 *"the occasional appearance of the river in the drawing-room" (Dombey and Son, Dickens).*

Leg 4: Kew Bridge to Richmond 4½ km=2½ miles



12 Just after crossing the Thames, go over the road at the pelican crossing and continue directly ahead on a minor road with Kew Green on your left. *In the far left corner is St Anne's Church, built in 1714 on land donated by Queen Anne and much extended by later Georges, hence its unique shape.* Keep to the right of the Green, by *Capel House* and pass (or drop into) *The Rose and Crown*. About 150m from the pub, turn **right** at a jutting building (actually the Herbarium) on Ferry Lane which is signposted to the Car Park. On reaching the riverside, turn **left** on the towpath. Shortly on your left is the glowing rosy edifice of Kew Palace. *This is the third building of what was always a royal palace, recently restored after a ten-year project, and open to the public as part of Kew Gardens.*

13 Soon, across the river is part of Brentford. Now you obtain a wider impression of the great expanse of Kew Gardens just to your left.

> *Kew Gardens (properly known as The Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew) is a UNESCO Word Heritage Site and quite simply one of the most wonderful places on earth. It covers over 121 ha (nearly 300 acres) and contains several huge glass houses, an orangery, a historic woodland house, a revered Pagoda, a Japanese garden, several lakes, an Alpine house and numerous exhibition areas. It was founded over 250 years ago and extended by King George III, aided by the explorer and president of the Royal Society Sir Joseph Banks. It holds the world's largest collection of living plants and is a hugely important centre for botanical research.*

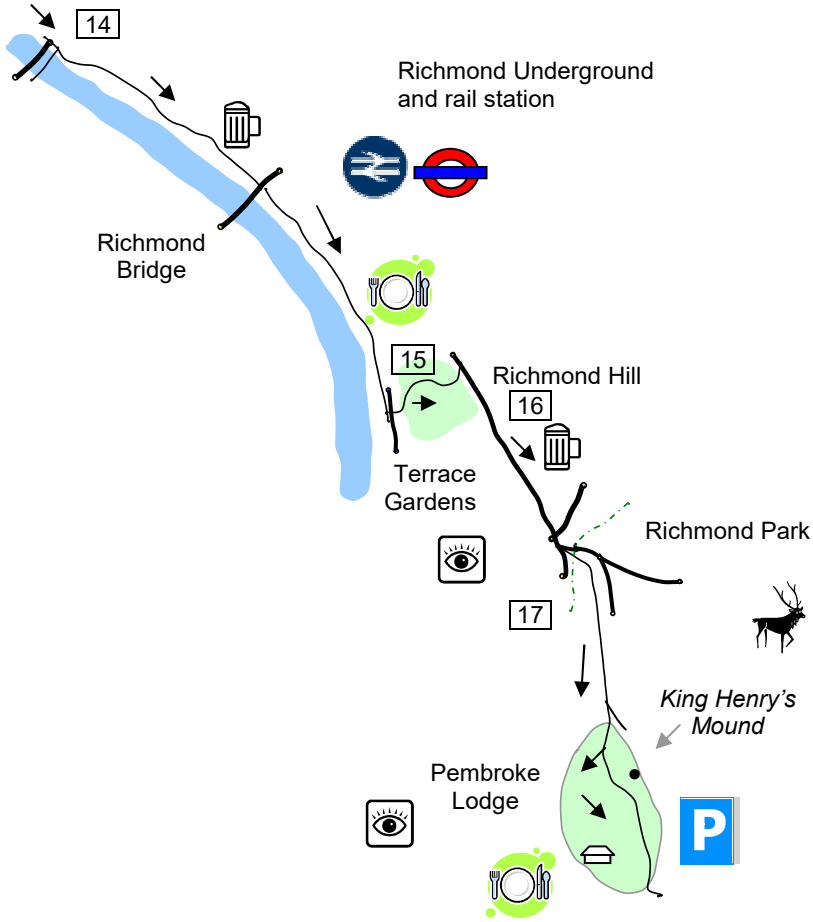
Later, across the Thames, a wide aspect of Syon House comes into view. *Syon House is the Duke of Northumberland's London residence, situated in huge Syon Park, designed by Robert Adam and landscaped by Capability Brown. The rooms are spacious beyond belief.* Soon you pass a meridian marker running through Old Deer Park, another huge open space which housed Kew Observatory at the time of George III and was the prime meridian until this

honour passed to Greenwich as late as 1884. As Syon Park across the river ends with its colourful belvedere, the town of Isleworth appears. Around the bend in the river, you pass the old meridian again. The next landmark is a colourful Victorian steel bridge-like structure.

Richmond Lock and Weir is in fact a pedestrian bridge but its main function is to act as a barrier to the tidal Thames. Upstream from here, the river flows normally and is held back at high tide. The lock is the last before the sea and is an entertaining spot for viewing colourful river craft.

Next come Twickenham Bridge and a railway bridge, after which you have the sweet sight of Richmond and its bridge ahead in the curve of the valley. *This scene is the subject of a painting by JMW Turner.*

Leg 5: Richmond to Pembroke Lodge 3 km=2 miles



14 On your left is a pub *The White Swan*, a quiet spot with some good food. (You could take this route and continue through Richmond Green and the town. There are many delightful ways through Richmond.) The route described here stays by the River Thames, a reliable companion to a most agreeable stroll. [Warning: the next section sometimes floods very quickly to almost knee depth in some parts; so it is advisable to check the times of high tides; you may need to divert (pleasantly!) through Richmond Green.] Pass the *White Cross* pub (Youngs) at the creek and continue past boat houses under the bridge. (From here you could cut left to Hill Street and follow Richmond Hill.) There are many opportunities to eat by the riverside.

15 Eventually the towpath passes a canoe club and zig-zags close to the Petersham Road. A short hop from here, under a huge plane tree, you will see on your left a kind of grotto. Turn **left** here down steps and through a

tunnel under the road known as the Grotto Gate, up curving stairs and into the Terrace Gardens, a hidden gem. (If the tunnel is shut, simply cross the road.) *The Terrace gardens were originally a brickworks, landscaped in the 1880s and extended to the river in the 1920s.* Take any route up the sloping park to Richmond Hill. The usual route is left, curving right up past the excellent café, up steps, left again and in a curve right and left, ending at the stone statue in the pond. *The statue was erected in the 1950s as "Aphrodite" but was mocked as bad taste and subsequently nicknamed "Bulbous Betty".* Go left-right-right round the statue, up steps and **right** along a terrace at the top. Leave the gardens and continue on the wide terrace walkway that runs next to the road.

16 Soon you have fantastic views of the River Thames as it curves away at Twickenham. *This view is a favorite subject for paintings, including another by JMW Turner from 1819. The creamy brick house, Downe House, was bought by Rolling Stone Mick Jagger and his lofty Texan wife Jerry Hall. Mick took his leave, but Jerry and their four children occasionally still live there. A little further on, on the right-hand side, is Wick House, bought by Pete Townshend of The Who, followed by the Start and Garter luxury apartment building.* Keep on to the junction and cross straight over (careful! it may be better to use the pedestrian crossings to switch to the **left**-hand side of the road just opposite the *Star and Garter*) through the gates of Richmond Park.

17 Keep **right** on the perimeter path. On your right is some sloping woodland of Petersham Common and, in roughly 300m, go **right** through a small gate beside a double iron gate taking you into the gardens that form the grounds of Pembroke Lodge. Just after the *laburnum walk*, take the **left** fork up in the direction of King Henry's Mound. From this little mound you can look through the telescope along a famous protected view.

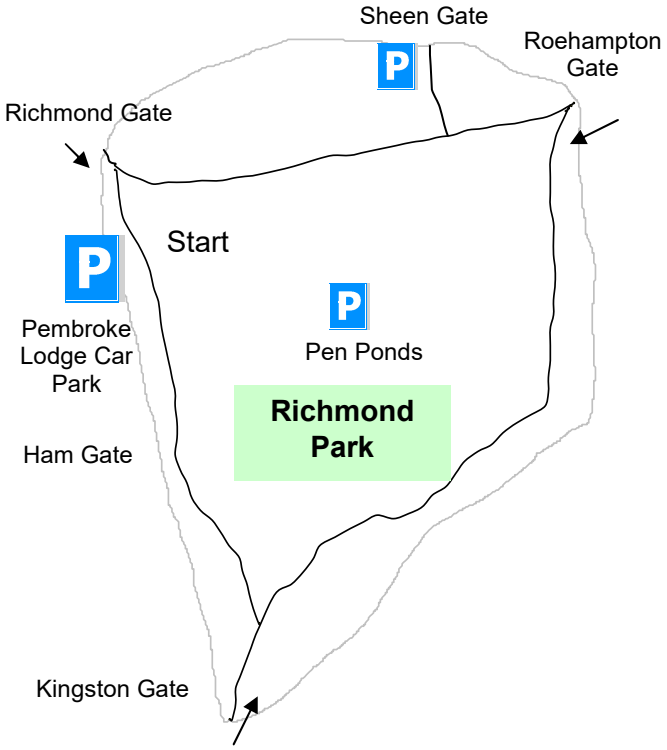
> *This view is an unbroken one of 16 km (more than 10 miles) all the way to St Paul's Cathedral in the City of London. The view was created in 1710. Even the trees of nearby Sidmouth Wood and several buildings in London had their plans changed or were reduced in size to preserve this precious view.*

Continue onwards through the garden and soon you reach Pembroke Lodge and the exit on the **left** into the car park where the walk began.

Getting there

By bus/train: Underground or rail to **Richmond**. Start at Leg 5. Bus routes 65 and 391 to **Kew Gardens**. Start at Leg 3.

By car: park in **Richmond Park** at any of the car parks shown below, preferably Pembroke Lodge.



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